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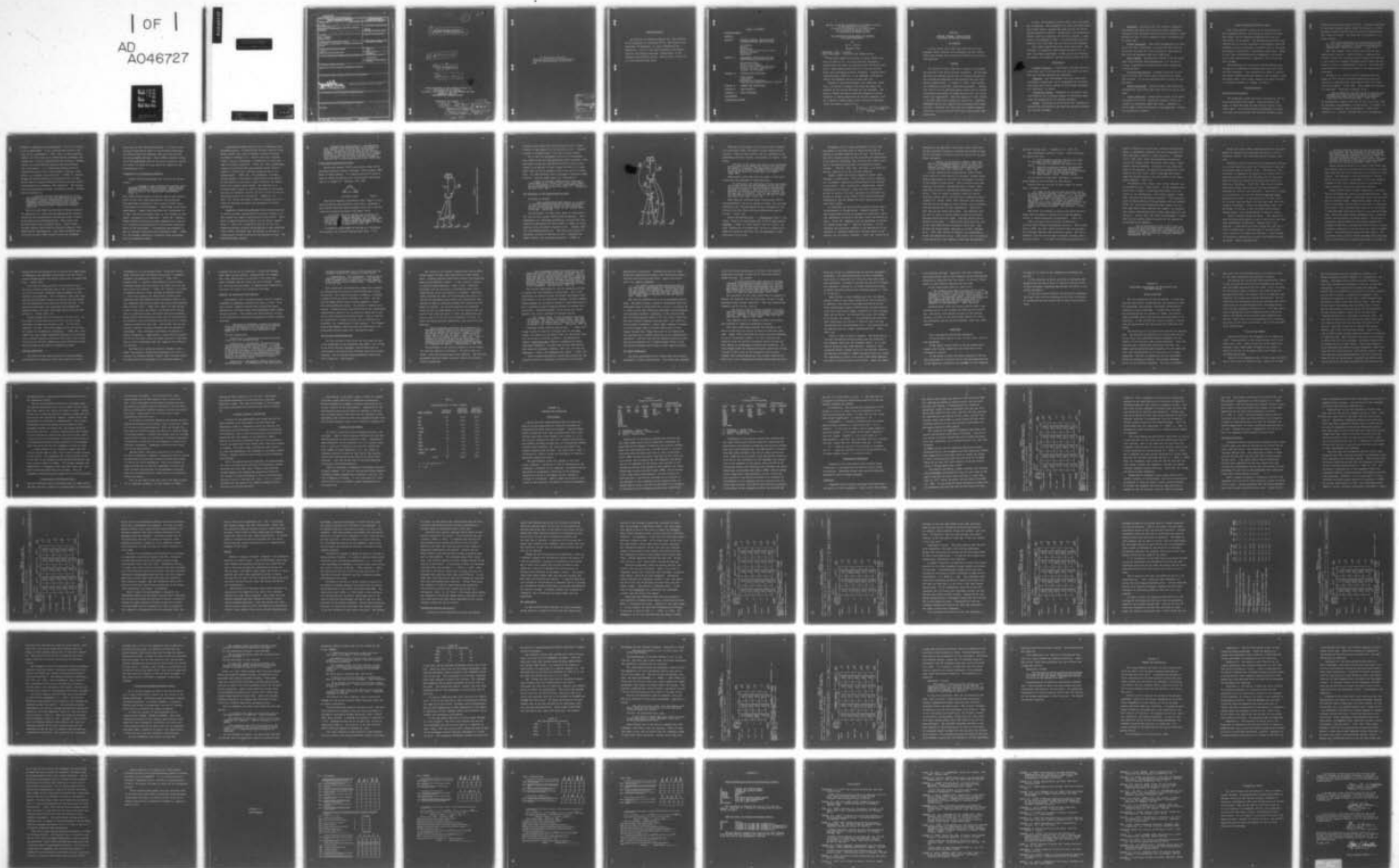
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IN AIR FORCE INTERNAL NEWSPAPERS.

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AFIT-CI-77-19

By

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RAY ALAN/CROCKETT

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To the loves of my life:
Carolyn, who bore it all with patience,
love and understanding, and Kris the
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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate Council
of the University of Florida
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in Journalism and Communications

THE GATEKEEPING RELATIONSHIPS IN INTERNAL
AIR FORCE NEWSPAPERS

By

Ray A. Crockett

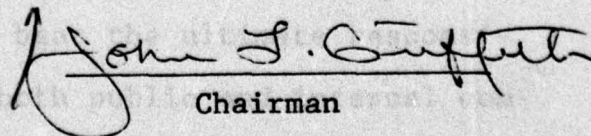
December 1976

Chairman: John L. Griffith

Major Department: Journalism and Communications

This study explored the manner in which content decisions are made in U.S. Air Force internal newspapers -- specifically, who makes the decisions under differing conditions. Questionnaires were sent to 147 active duty Air Force units publishing internal newspapers. Separate questionnaires were filled out by the commander, information officer and newspaper editor for each such unit.

Results of the survey indicate that under most conditions, the editor is normally the person who makes the majority of the content decisions for the newspaper. The extent to which the editor exercises autonomy in content decisions is usually determined by the unit commander, and the commander normally makes content decisions regarding crises (accidents, crimes, etc.).


Chairman

CHAPTER I

PROBLEM, PURPOSE, SCOPE OF STUDY, LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

The Problem

To what extent and in what ways does the Air Force newspaper editor function as a gatekeeper and what forces affect the autonomy and attitudes with which he carries out this function?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the gatekeeping function in Air Force internal newspapers. The military services have devoted a great deal of time and resources to the training and education of the personnel who edit their internal publications. In theory, at least, these editors are trained to be skillful, objective gatekeepers. Information officers are in positions which require them to monitor the quantity and quality of communications into, out of and within the organization. They are supposed to allow editors to do their jobs with a minimum of supervision...hopefully. Commanders may be only superficially acquainted with communications techniques, but they bear the ultimate responsibility for setting policy for both public and internal communications.

In fact, the boundaries between these roles very often are ill-defined. Some commanders edit every word which goes into "their" paper, usurping the roles of both the editor and the information officer. Occasionally, the information officer limits or eliminates the editor's autonomy -- sometimes in the commander's name -- in deciding what specific materials will find their way into print in the newspaper.

This study examined how these roles interlocked. Specifically, it examined to what extent the editor is, in fact, the primary gatekeeper, to what extent his decisions are subject to preemption, and what factors affect the two.

Definitions

Internal newspaper: A publication published within an active duty unit of the Air Force for the benefit of military and civilian employees and dependents.

Commander: The "top manager" of an Air Force unit; according to regulations, he is responsible for the editorial policy and overall content of the internal newspaper--the "publisher," in effect.

Information officer: Comparable to the public relations director in a civilian company, he ordinarily supervises the production of the internal newspaper.

Editor: The person in an Air Force unit (normally an enlisted man of relatively low rank) who actually produces the internal newspaper.

Gatekeeper: The person who sits astride a communication channel and makes the decisions on which information arriving at this strategic position will be allowed to travel through his "gate" to be consumed by others, and which will be turned away.

Primary gatekeeper: That person designated by at least two of the three respondents in a given Air Force unit as the person who makes the final decisions on what material goes into the newspaper under most conditions.

Major command: (Majcom) That echelon of the Air Force which falls directly below Headquarters U. S. Air Force. A large, geographically dispersed unit with a single specialized mission.

Air Force News Service: A weekly collection of articles--both news and feature--about subjects of Air Force-wide interest. It is distributed by mail to units all over the world.

Routine conditions: The day-to-day, often repetitive circumstances under which news flows into an Air Force newspaper.

Crisis conditions: Created when an event occurs which transcends the routine, significant enough to affect the transfer of information about that event. Typically, a crisis might include an accident of some magnitude, a crime, or some kind of "scandal."

Scope of Study and Source of Data

This study entailed a census of all active duty Air Force newspaper editors, the information officer for whom they worked, and the immediate commanders who were the "publishers" of the papers. The questionnaire explored such ramifications as overall gatekeeper relationships; perceived autonomy as primary gatekeeper; perceived value of the paper for readers; and obstacles to gatekeeper performance. These, in turn, were crosstabulated with demographic information such as rank and experience, respondent; size of base and major command.

The methodology for the survey involved mailing questionnaires to respondents affiliated with each active duty Air Force newspaper. Each respondent was asked to indicate his opinion regarding decision-making on the newspaper, using five-point Likert scale items, ranging from "Agree Strongly" to "Disagree Strongly" or "Always" to "Never."

Related Research

The Classical Gatekeeper

The gatekeeper concept was first introduced in 1947 by social psychologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin had studied the manner in which food made its way from the source to the dinner table. He conceptualized the gatekeeper as a decision-maker who decided what food would be allowed to pass

along the channel from source to table. Gatekeepers appeared at intervals, manning "gates" along this channel, and their decisions affected the decision latitude of gatekeepers further along the channel. But Lewin saw his gatekeeper in a larger context:

This (the functioning of an area within the channel as a 'gate') holds not only for food channels but also for the travelling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group.... (1947: 145)

With that comment, Lewin opened a new vista of mass communication research. David M. White, a communications scholar of some note, borrowed Lewin's concept and undertook a case study of a newspaper telegraph editor (1950) that has become a classic in communications research. The result was a proliferation of conceptual studies of the communications gatekeeper.

Sandman et al. (1972) defined a communications gatekeeper as "any person in the news-gathering process with authority to make decisions affecting the flow of information to the public" (1972: 103). They claimed the key word is "authority". According to Hiebert et al.,

The gatekeeper in the news operation exercises his judgement as to which items are the most significant. He emphasizes those that are important and deletes those that have little news value. (1975: 107)

Servan-Schrieber summed up the role of the communicator (and, by inference, the gatekeeper) in four points: to select, to condense, to simplify, and to synthesize (1974: 145).

Hiebert et al., however, believed there was a distinction

between a communicator and a gatekeeper: "If he is creating, he is a communicator. If he is evaluating another's creation, he is a gatekeeper." (1975: 113). It seems possible, however, for one person to be simultaneously gatekeeper and communicator, if he is evaluating his own creation. Dimmick thought the answer depended upon the role being played:

"The 'gate-keeper'...is a disjunctive category which is exemplified by any of the roles of editor, reporter, news source, or publisher (news executive)." (1969: 5). Dimmick brought up a point which will be discussed later in some detail--that of someone technically outside the news channel being defined as a gatekeeper (the publisher). The development of the gatekeeper concept, according to Gordon, allowed social scientists to:

...construct virtual road maps and draw vectors that demonstrated who and what influenced the coverage and content of print communications, particularly in newspapers--processes of continual selection and censorship (often euphemistically called 'editing') carried on frequently under considerable pressure. (1975: 79)

White's study (1950) was the first of many to explore the gatekeeper as a person and to examine how his personal prejudices and idiosyncrasies affected the manner in which he carried out his responsibilities. White found such personal factors had a profound effect. Gieber (1956) obtained similar results when he studied a number of telegraph editors simultaneously. Both White and Geiber were criticized by Bass (1969) because he felt the telegraph

editor was not the "key decision-maker." In that, he was proved at least partly right by research which found that wire editors were very dependent upon cues from the wire service in making decisions. White (1964) claimed he recognized the gatekeeping roles of the press association editors and others, but chose the wire editor for simplicity and methodological ease.

Components of the Gatekeeping Function

Dimmick divided gatekeeping into two distinct sub-processes:

...a sensing or input identification process and a valuation or output defining process. These two sub-processes define two sets of decision problems which must be solved by the organization's gatekeepers. (1974: 2)

Bass (1969) devised similar divisions, applied more specifically to news flow--news gathering and news processing. News gathering corresponds to what Lasswell (1948) called "surveillance of the environment." Those doing surveillance (gatekeepers), Lasswell said, deal with the "conductance" of a signal from the environment--that is, the strength of that signal, analogous to its importance. (1948: 86). Likewise, Wright defined surveillance in mass communications terms as the "collection and distribution of information concerning events in the environment...corresponding approximately to what is popularly conceived as the handling of news" (1960: 97). Thus Wright conceptually integrated "news processing" into his surveillance model.

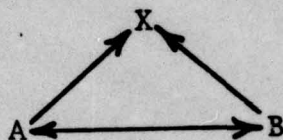
Gatekeeping includes various forms of information and knowledge control. It particularly includes forms of information control that arise in message encoding decisions, according to Donohue et al., "such as selection, shaping, display, timing, withholding, or repetition of entire messages or message components". (1972: 42). Thus, gatekeeping studies are concerned with what Lasswell called "control analysis"--factors that "initiate and guide the act of communication". (1948: 84). The gatekeeper, in effect, controls access to his medium, necessitated by the ability of that medium to carry only a small portion of the events which occur during a given period. His function is to "evaluate media content in order to determine its relevance and value to audiences" and "to cut off or alter the flow of information base on his evaluation". (Hiebert et al., 1975: 107). He has the power to delete a message and to increase or decrease the amount and importance of certain information.

Bagdikian claimed the gatekeeper-editor makes decisions on routine stories, serving notice to others in doing so of what stories are likely to get printed in the future. "Decisions on major stories are usually, but not always, made by others." (1971: 89). Though White pointed out the role played by personal opinions and prejudices in news selection, Cirino (1971) maintained that the editing of the news is "capriciously" biased in selection and omission of news. And Servan-Schrieber averred:

...exaggeration, generalization, oversimplification, omission, misinterpretation, to say nothing of basic factual error, still mar the disseminated message. Inaccuracies and untruths are all the more dangerous in that the content is worthy of the package, and error is sown in the minds of people who, unlike their forebears, have not been alerted to lending a skeptical ear to everything they are told. (1974: 193)

A Gatekeeping Communication Model

Westley and MacLean (1957) constructed a model of the gatekeeper function, based on Newcomb's (1953) elegant "ABX" model of shared symbols. A's communication with B about X leads to shared perceptions of it and attaches shared meanings to it (Figure 1)" (Newcomb, 1953: 399).



Newcomb's model

Figure 1

Westley and MacLean's gatekeeper model (Figure 2) integrated receivers with behavioral roles (B's), gatekeepers with channel roles who serve as agents of B's (C's) and the totality of objects and events "out there" (X's).

C is conceived of as one who can (a) select the abstractions of object X appropriate to B's need satisfactions or problem solutions, (b) transform them into some form of symbol containing messages shared with B, and finally (c) transmit such symbols by means of some channel or medium to B. (1957: 58)

C extends B's environment by serving as a "non-purposive encoder" for "selected abstractions" (X's). "C's

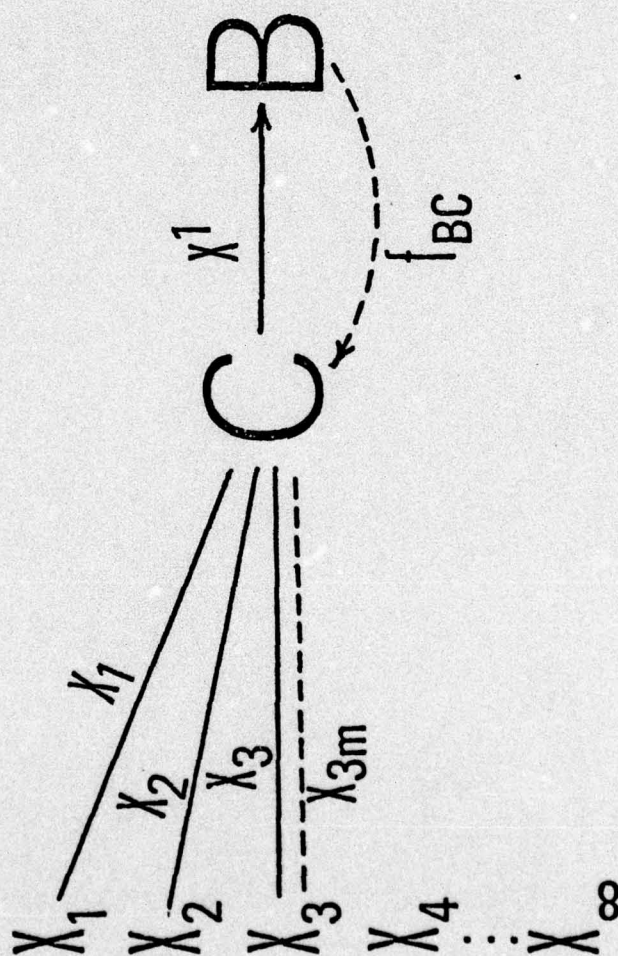


Figure 2
Westley and MacLean's First Gatekeeper Model

survive to the extent they satisfy needs for B's," since several C's may compete for the attention of B's. B may be a person, a primary group, or an entire social system.

But in fact the gatekeeper function is considerably more complex than the first gatekeeper model indicates. The gatekeeper (C) may get information directly from his environment or he may get it from a source (A) who is in touch with a part of the environment C may or may not be in touch with. A's play advocacy roles and engage in purposive communication. Thus the model looks more like Figure 3.

Clearly in the mass communications situation, a large number of C's receive from a very large number of A's and transmit to a vastly large number of B's, who simultaneously receive from other C's. (Westley and MacLean, 1957: 60)

The Gatekeeper in the Institutional Context

According to Chaney:

...mass communications will operate in a context of institutionalized values and criteria of success, not only the particular values of their reference groups, but the central values of the societal normative order. (1972: 62)

The gatekeeper, in other words, must be considered in the institutional context within which he operates. Most gatekeepers are "operating according to criteria that they regard as professional or institutional or simply as consequences of the job they're supposed to do" (Gordon, 1975: 79). And Dimmick pointed out: "The day-to-day process of gathering, writing and editing the news...represents an almost classic case of bureaucratization." (1969: 2).

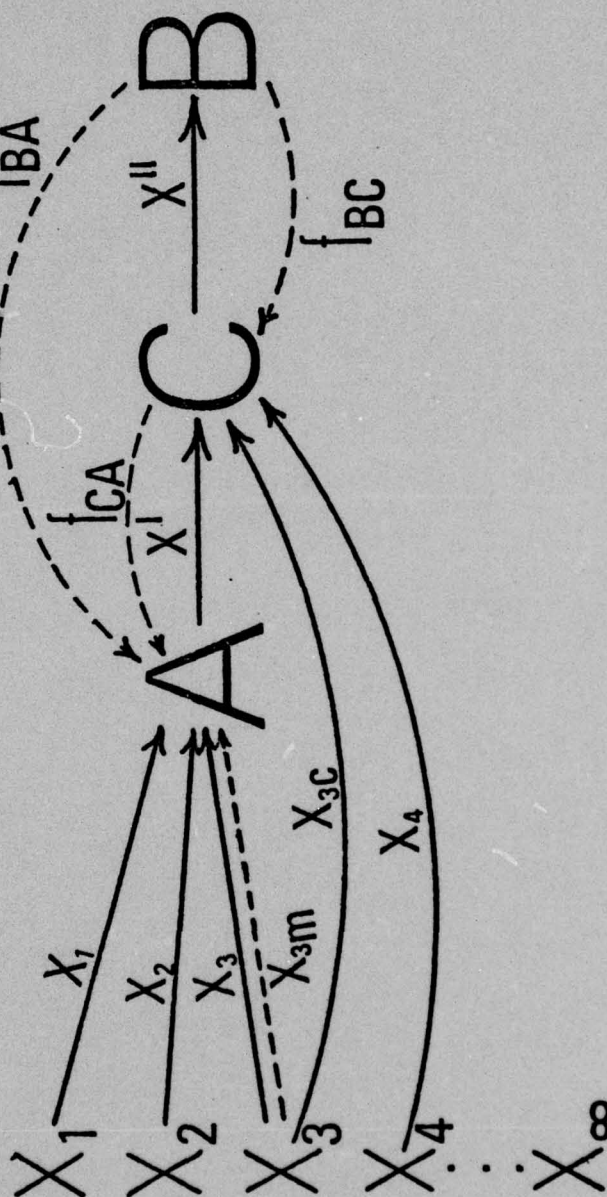


Figure 3
Westley and MacLean's Second Gatekeeper Model

Relating the gatekeeper to his institutional backdrop is a relatively recent development in mass communications research. There is some evidence that its influence on the gatekeeping function, however, overshadows all others. Said Geiber:

The fate of the local news story is not determined by the needs of the audience or even by the values of the symbol it contains. The news story is controlled by the frame of reference created by the bureaucratic structure of which the communicator is a member. (1964: 389)

Among others, Stein discussed the effect of the institution upon the gatekeeper's decision-making:

In most cases, the underlying attitudes are shaped, not by the convictions and prejudices of one man or a small group of men, but by the policies and practices of large corporations. The new forms of control are difficult to analyze because they are so indirect, so diffuse, and so pervasive. For the same reasons, they are difficult to evade or resist on the part of those who labor under them. (1972: 44)

While many are concerned about institutional effects upon gatekeepers, few are as unkind as Gordon, who said most gatekeepers are "interchangeable drones, surrogates of the cultural role that their particular publication plays in society". (1975: 79).

Rivers and Schramm wrote, "...everything belongs to the editor. There is no law holding that an editor must publish anything." (1969: 3). While legally they are correct, and their idealism is to be applauded, the fact is there are a number of pressures that bear upon the gatekeeper in the performance of his task.

Krieghbaum (1972) classed gatekeepers as one of the four points in the news chain at which pressure may be applied to interfere with the flow of news. The result is that "most newsmen respond to the pressures and expectations of the newsroom (including 'what the boss will think') more than to any generalized concept of readership or public interest". (Gerbner, 1969: 242). The boss, as we shall see shortly, applies one of the fiercest pressures.

Gerbner (1969) listed nine sources of "power" which influence a communicator. Five of them--clients, supervisors, colleagues, competitors and auxiliaries--are internal to his medium. Four --authorities, organizations, experts and patrons--are external. These last four can be categorized as sources, and their importance as "pressure" can be seen in Carter's study (1958), which found considerable difference in the way newsmen and their sources perceive each other's goals.

An important way the institution exerts pressure upon the gatekeeper is through policy. Dimmick believed, "The news organization's policy is perhaps the single most important determinant of which of the day's events are defined as news." (1974: 14). Bagdikian said the gatekeeper is forced to consider policy when he makes his decisions: "If his decisions are noticeably contrary to the news policy of his editorial or corporate supervisors, he hears about it and usually, but not always, conforms " (1971: 89). Policy is an

extension of the publisher, and Donohue (1965) found that the most profound influence on coverage and display of news was the publisher's attitude toward the subject of the news. Geiber contended:

...policy, in its positive aspects, tells them the way the newspaper defines its job of public service. In its negative aspects, policy dictates to a reporter how he should shape a story and what kinds of news and names are interdicted. (1960: 201)

In most communications organizations, Breed (1955b) found, policy is never explicitly discussed, because policy implies suppression of some news and enlargement of others at the expense of objectivity. Subtle pressures work upon reporters and editors, influencing them to "slant" their reporting of events to conform with publishers' implicit policy. "This is likely to manifest itself in stories favoring a policy and in the omission of information which counters it." (Breed, 1955b: 188). Reporters (and editors) learn policy not through any overt process, but by assimilation and observation of their organization. They learn what they can and cannot write about. The publisher does not have to resort to direct orders to have his personal feelings reflected in his paper. Kentucky editors and reporters in one study, "...knew without being told what sort of news play would be most pleasing to their boss. And, without any direct orders, they gave it to him". (Sandman et al., 1972: 100). Policy is ethereal, yet unyielding as stone--and omnipresent as air. Only 24 per cent of reporters in one survey felt that "definite fixed news and editorial

policies" did not exist. (Sandman et al., 1972: 97) .

Most gatekeepers conform to policy. Breed postulated six reasons for this:

1. Institutional authority and sanctions (fear of punishment, firing, demotions, etc.).
2. Feelings of obligation and esteem for superiors.
3. Mobility aspirations (desire for promotion).
4. Absence of conflicting group allegiance.
5. Pleasant nature of the activity (in-groupness, interesting work, other job-related benefits).
6. News becomes a value. (1955b: 184-87)

All six factors, Breed said, contribute to reference group formation and conformity by the reporter.

Staffers who are critical of policy adapt in several ways, according to Breed:

- (1) Keep on the job but blunt the sharp corners of policy whenever possible ('If I wasn't here the next guy would let all that crap through....'); (2) Attempt to repress the conflict amorally and anti-intellectually ('What the hell, it's only a job; take your pay and forget it....'); (3) Attempt to compensate by taking it out in other contexts; drinking, writing 'the truth' for liberal (or underground) publications, working with action programs...and otherwise. (1955b: 193)

The result of conformity to policy with which the gatekeeper does not agree is acquisition of what Krieghbaum called "a certain elasticity of conscience". (1972: 95).

There are other factors besides the publisher's policies which influence gatekeeping decisions. White (1950), Carter (1959) and Lewin (1947) cautioned that the gatekeeper's feelings influence the decisions he makes. But this is different from the way the owner's personal feelings influence the product: "...an owner sets policy (occasionally) in

order to achieve his own business, personal and political goals. A gatekeeper influences the news (constantly) despite his honest efforts to remain objective." (Sandman et al., 1972: 110). Clark and Blankenburg outlined succinctly the factors other than policy which affect a gatekeeper's decision-making: the amount of time, money and tools at his disposal; the quality and availability of raw material; his own traits, skills, knowledge and values; legal and social pressures; and the desires of his large, unseen audience (1973: 27).

According to some studies, that "unseen audience" may be unheeded as well. Geiber wrote: "If the reporters have one or more 'readers' in mind when they write, it is an editor or, not infrequently, their fellow newsmen." (1960: 203). And Clark and Blankenburg lamented: "The surpassing irony is the insulation of the gatekeeper from his audience" (1973: 31). One study demonstrated that a gatekeeper can have some idea of what interests his readers, but nevertheless selects articles that more closely approximate his own interests (Finch, 1965: 33). That the gatekeeper's "readership" may be confined within the walls of the newsroom is illustrated by an anecdote:

...one internationally known science writer confessed that he could always insure massive play for a story if it dealt with hangovers, hemorrhoids, or sex impotency--because at least one copy reader around any sizable desk suffered from each of these conditions. (Kriegbaum, 1972: 92)

Bailey and Lichty (1972), however, pointed out that gatekeepers do consider their audiences and derive a sort of "cybernetic effect" from them based on past audience reaction.

Mechanical factors--which Clark and Blankenburg referred to as "time, money and tools" and "raw materials," may exert an influence that is heaviest of all. Said Hulteng, "The journalist is supposed to be guided by the central ethic of reporting the news fully and accurately; but he also must function within the context of the particular medium for which he is reporting." (1976: 64). That context includes, among other things, news hole for the print journalist, available air time for the broadcaster. And no one is immune to its pressures, not even the respected New York Times, which was once asked, "If you publish all the news that's fit to print, how come there's so much more news that's fit to print on Sundays" (Clark and Blankenburg, 1973: 24)? The answer, of course, is that the heavy advertising on Sundays permits an increased amount of editorial space.

Speed is another mechanical factor. "The speed with which the mass media operate is one of the factors that make their gatekeeping so difficult," Schramm (1973: 141) declared. A news editor may print enough copy each day to fill an average book, rejecting eight or ten more books-worth, and all in the space of a few hours. Little wonder the mechanical complexities of such a task require so much attention. Geiber concluded that:

The most powerful factor was not the evaluative nature of news but the pressures of getting copy into the newspaper; the telegraph editor was preoccupied with the mechanical pressures of his work rather than the social meanings and impact of the news. His personal evaluations rarely entered into his selection process; the values of his employer were an accepted part of the newsroom environment. (1964: 175)

Geiber similarly found in an earlier study (1956) that wire editors were more concerned with the mechanics of their jobs, many evincing little knowledge of or concern for their readers. The newspaper's bias was accepted as "another detail in the operation of the desk." If we take Geiber's findings at face value, mechanical factors override all others--personal, policy and readership combined.

Breed (1955a) found a further indication of the salience of the mechanical factor in gatekeeping decisions. Wire editors he studied seemed to make heavy use of the wire budget as a decision guide. Many editors simply took the stories on the budget and used them in the order in which they were listed. This eliminated the necessity for the editor to make decisions about which stories to use and how to play them. Breed also found larger newspapers play a "decision guide" role for editors on smaller papers. The editors on the smaller papers looked to their larger neighbors for guidance on news play, creating what Breed called an "arterial effect" analogous to the two-step flow theory of communications. He proposed four reasons for this effect: (1) Journalism lacks a body of tested knowledge about news judgment; (2) The Editor of a smaller paper gains a feeling of

having done his job adequately if he follows the bigger paper; (3) Newspapers are sometimes understaffed; and (4) A drive toward cosmopolitanism--the smaller paper wants to appear "big time" (1955a: 281).

The result of these practices--of allowing the wire service to decide on news play and of the "arterial effect"--is a kind of national conformity among newspapers in both substance and appearance. And it produces a day-to-day sameness in any given paper because the emotion has been washed out and replaced by nicely boxed facts from the wire. "The world may seem unruly, but everything that happened had happened before; one day's front page looked very much like another's." (Stein, 1972: 17).

Stempel argued that this conformity did not exist. In his study, he found that the use of wire services varies from paper to paper and from day to day. "In the final analysis," he said, "this study suggests that the wire does not impose its standards on a newspaper." (1964: 384). Hiatt (1970) felt that Stempel identified differences in selection rates--perhaps caused by artificial limitations such as news hole size--but did not consider story play differences which may have mediated the lack of conformity he found.

Conflict Edited Out

One result of all these pressures on the gatekeepers, particularly with regard to local news, appears to be the

"blacking out" of controversial news. Geiber and Johnson found, "The political and administrative goal is community consensus, the absence of controversy." (1961: 292). Janowitz said, "...neither local people nor local leaders ordinarily expect the local press to do other than 'put the town's best foot forward'." (1952: 51). Finally, in a study of community editors, Olien, Tichenor and Donohue stated, "...this study supports the observations of some social scientists that the community press frequently tends to protect community institutions rather than report the disruptive side of public life." (1968: 252). Again, we find the publisher is most often the culprit, the fellow we've already seen is a sometimes unseen, but always effective gatekeeper. Bowers (1967) found that about 30 per cent of the publishers he studied at least occasionally directed the use or non-use, content or display of local news. The further the news was from the locality, the more infrequent was the publisher's involvement. Also, publisher involvement was heaviest in smaller communities. Significantly, almost half the publishers in the study were likely to become involved in news judgment at least occasionally when the "image of the community" was involved.

The result of a policy of conflict avoidance--under which "the progress, growth and achievements of a city are praised, the failures buried," (Breed, 1958: 193) and "facts and ideas which are disturbing to the accepted system of

illusions are not to be verbalized" (Vidich and Bensman, 1960: 308)--can be profound. Bagdikiansaid, for example, that "news organizations too devoted to the status quo resist evidence that the status quo isn't working". (1969: 10). Once that process begins, a communications organization can watch its purpose and credibility slip away.

Dimmick: An Impressive Consolidation

John Dimmick (1974) assembled perhaps the most complete compendium of gatekeeper research and theory to date. From that research, Dimmick extracted four propositions which delineate the conditions under which gatekeepers make communications decisions. The propositions leaned heavily on work on the institutional setting of gatekeeping, because, Dimmick explained:

...the scope of gatekeeper research has widened from a concentration on bias and selective perception of editors and reporters to a recognition of the organizational context in which gatekeepers work. (1974: 1)

The four propositions:

Proposition 1: Gatekeepers are uncertain which events are to be defined as news.

Proposition 2: Gatekeepers' potential universe identification uncertainty is reduced by: 1) accepting the definition of an 'opinion leader' in a group within which he works, 2) arriving at a group consensus, 3) monitoring the output of a reference institution, 4) accepting the policy of the organization for which he works, 5) accepting the definition of news promulgated by his sources, and 6) using his own group-related attitudes and values.

Proposition 3: Gatekeepers' decision spaces are multidimensional. The dimensions of the space are the

criteria the gatekeeper uses to select news from the potential universe for broadcast or publication.

Proposition 4: The gatekeepers' actual universe selection uncertainty is reduced (i.e., the partial order is mapped into a simple order) by the composition model(s) used by the gatekeeper. (Dimmick, 1974: 8, 10, 14, 16)

Both conjunctive and disjunctive models were proposed as illustrating the criteria by which gatekeepers reduce uncertainty. The conjunctive model is additive, including a number of factors which contribute to "news". The disjunctive model defines news as being judged by a single overriding definition factor. But neither is wholly satisfactory. Dimmick's pilot study (1974) found that experienced communicators tended to use a conjunctive model and to construct a multidimensional decision space. News to them was not composed of a single attribute such as timeliness or proximity, but a combination of such concepts. The inexperienced group Dimmick tested was more inclined toward a unidimensional decision space and a disjunctive model.

The Internal Medium Gatekeeper

All the research to this point has discussed the role of the gatekeeper in the commercial mass media. But a study of Air Force internal newspapers clearly deals with an institutional setting entirely different from those already examined. How do internal media gatekeepers differ from their commercial counterparts?

The literature on business communications and so-called "house organs" provides some exploration of these differences. Internal employee publications differ from commercial media in one important respect: in this country, there is no legally defined employees' right to know. Employees' knowledge level of and access to information about their organizations varies from excellent to abysmal. McElreath (1973) believed the level of such knowledge and access is a function of leadership style rather than organization type and that it made no difference whether the organization was public or private. But in most organizations management foots the bill for publishing its internal journal, and its position has often been that it "owns" the publication and can put into it or not put into it whatever it wants. At least one former business communicator took issue with that position:

Since management authorizes the expenditure of substantial sums of money on the house journal, surely (it may be argued) this gives it the right to exhort and censure as much as it pleases. Having paid the piper, may it not call the tune? Indeed, in law or ethics there is nothing to deny it that right. Yet to exercise it would be to destroy the whole basis of confidence and understanding between management and employee which the internal house journal is designed to strengthen and support. (Bernard Smith, 1961: 33)

The gatekeeper in the internal medium is not so different from his commercial counterpart. He may be more confined: rules and policies may be more explicit. The internal gatekeeper may find himself severely tried by his institutional surroundings:

...they (management) hedge him around with so many checks and controls and taboos that the production of each issue becomes a battle against authority. All too often the editor, wearied by this ceaseless struggle in which the odds are heavily against him, loses heart and interest and plays safe by excluding anything which can possibly arouse opposition, so that the house journal becomes an insipid reflection of the negative attitudes of his management. (Bernard Smith, 1961: 75)

The internal publication is like its commercial brother in another way--the avoidance of controversy. But if the researchers on commercial media are mildly reproving of what they consider to be an unfortunate tendency, business communications experts are stridently verbose in their opposition to what is probably a major crippling disease in internal communications. Marshall McLuhan, in one of his more lucid moments, once told an audience of business editors:

Your biggest hangup is that you have no bad news. Good news is hard to see. It means change. Real news is bad news. You must have bad news to sell good news. It convinces the readers that 'there but for the grace of God go I; but I have survived'. (Reporting, 1959: 6)

McCloskey chided internal publications: "...there still clings to many of them that nostalgic aura of the happy family, into whose life no harsh truths, no controversy, must ever be allowed to intrude. (1959: 6). And Newcomb and Sammons, Advertising Age's internal communications gurus, admonished management, "In good times or bad--particularly bad--keep your employees informed. Don't let the rumor go unanswered. Stay in the communications saddle " (1971: 31).

Other internal publication critics have pointed out the potential effects of avoidance of conflict on an internal

publication's credibility. "Nothing destroys the credibility of a publication as much as the discrepancy between the real world and the print world," argued Peterfreund. (1974: 22). Halley commented:

...to ignore a topic obvious and significant to all undermines a publication by casting grave doubts upon its honesty and credibility. In all such cases, the best policy is to present the facts, simply and straightforwardly; to put the facts into perspective; and to seek thereby to neutralize rumor and speculation. (1959: 96)

The loss of credibility can also be explained theoretically. The media provide a source of information about the environment that is accepted by the receiver to the extent he is unable to test the accuracy of the media's picture against some non-media standard. Logically, if the receiver does have a standard against which to test the media's depiction, and that standard disagrees with the media, the result is a loss of media credibility. Even a small community newspaper is in less danger than an internal publication in this regard, because many things that occur in an organization are observable by a sizable proportion of the organization's population. And those who did not actually witness an event can use the grapevine as a standard against which to test the internal medium's half-truths or even complete silence.

Air Force Gatekeepers

Air Force gatekeepers do not differ much from internal gatekeepers in other organizations. The single most important

study on Air Force gatekeepers is by Hielt, who analyzed gatekeeping decisions on specific Air Force News Service (AFNS) articles. He claimed:

...it would seem likely that editors of civilian newspapers are required to select articles in accordance with standards prescribed by higher ups; and to that extent they are not the gatekeepers but the real gatekeepers are the supervisors who made the policies. The crucial point here is that the base newspaper editor is simply not the gatekeeper. (1970: 110)

One hypothesis of this study tested Hielt's argument in general, but proposed that the editor may, in fact, be the gatekeeper under certain conditions. Hielt was supported by comments from his survey, such as:

The editor of any Air Force newspaper is no more the actual editor than a civilian copy boy. He prints what the commander or other high-ranking officers want printed. Likewise, he doesn't print what they don't want printed. (Hielt, 1970: 109)

This complaint does not appear to differ from similar ones observed in commercial gatekeeper research.

This study investigated whether the autonomy of the editor varied with the context in which his decisions were made. Waxman (1973) discussed the social structure dimension he calls "situational context." A crisis involves some departure from the routine situational context and may produce changes in gatekeeping procedures and techniques. But where Waxman found the communication gates opened wide during a crisis in the locale of the commercial radio station studied, this study proposed that the reverse occurs in Air Force units--that communications become constricted and facts

about the crisis are withheld from the internal newspaper's readership. The prediction was that Air Force commanders would react to controversy or crisis very much like small-town publishers. Bad news is not good for the unit's "image." The commander's response is, as former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Phil Goulding phrased it, "Play it in low key."

Some of Hielt's other findings were that low-ranking editors tended to have lower valuations of the Air Force as an employer, that editors with higher opinions of the Air Force showed higher usage of AFNS material and that editors rated their supervisors highly, regardless of their feelings about the Air Force. He explained the latter, not without justification, by saying, "...the gatekeepers may have felt their supervisors were forced to function under the same restrictions that the gatekeepers were. The supervisors did not make the policies, higher headquarters did." (Hielt, 1970: 121).

There is logic in Hielt's argument. But policy for an internal publication typically comes from the "publisher," the commander whose unit the newspaper serves. It is that line of authority this study explored. Similarly, Hielt translated Breed's (1955b) notion of institutional authority and sanction and Gieber's (1960) emotional climate as reasons for conforming to policy, into survey items which addressed the editor's opinions about the Air Force. Again, he seemed

to be shooting too high. Logically, the local commander, who reviews every issue of the newspaper and who possesses the authority to "hire and fire" the editor, is the more likely source of institutional authority and sanctions.

In his dissertation abstract, Hiatt wrote:

The variables were able to account for 17.79 per cent of the variance in the story selection scores. The variables were able to account for 35.45 per cent of the variance in the story play scores. There remained, therefore, a considerable amount of variance unaccounted for, suggesting that some new variables need to be examined to ascertain fully the influence on the decisions of the gatekeepers. (1970: abstract)

Unquestionably, Hiatt was correct when he noted a significant portion of the variance he found was unaccounted for. One factor could account for much of that missing variance, and that is the relationship between the editor, the information officer and the commander, which this study examined.

Hypotheses

This investigation tested five hypotheses:

- 1) The Air Force editor is not, in most cases, the primary gatekeeper.
- 2) The editor is more likely to be the primary gatekeeper under routine conditions, but loses much of his autonomy in a crisis.
- 3) The extent to which the editor performs as the primary gatekeeper is a function of his rank and experience and of the importance attached to the newspaper by his commander,

in terms of its value to the commander in performing his mission.

4) The obstacles an editor perceives as preventing his doing his job the way he feels it should be done will vary in kind and number, depending upon whether the editor is the primary gatekeeper.

5) Air Force editors believe that Air Force commanders, like small town civilian publishers, prefer that controversy be avoided and bad news played down in their local publications.

CHAPTER II
DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLING PLAN
AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Flow Plan

Once the hypotheses had been formulated, a survey flow plan was constructed, integrating all the necessary actions for developing, distributing, retrieving, coding and processing the survey instrument. To begin with, variables were matched against one another in "dummy" crosstables-- sample paradigms which would provide data applicable to the hypotheses. It was decided that simple crosstabs, frequencies and correlations were the statistical techniques most useful.

The second step in the survey flow plan was the sampling plan. The universe was defined as all active duty units in the Air Force that published internal newspapers for the benefit of their military and civilian personnel. Since the intention was to obtain data from every such unit, the sample and the population were congruent, but the sample was dealt with statistically as if it were part of a larger population. The unit of observation was the individual-- either the information officer, the internal newspaper editor or the immediate commander. Two units of analysis

were used--both the individual and the installation (that is, the three respondents from each unit or base).

The mailing list of the "Air Force News Service," which is sent to every Air Force internal newspaper, was used to draw the sample population for this study. After screening out those publications serving Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard units, the original 250 or so addresses were reduced to 147 active duty internal publications. Most of these were base newspapers serving one self-contained installation with its own housekeeping force--including police, fire, housing, shopping, recreation, etc. A few were publications serving units with integrated mission identities such as Air Weather Service and Air Force Communications Service. Fewer still serve a geographical area containing more than one Air Force installation, such as "The Defender" of Air Forces Korea.

Nature of the Sample

Mean circulation of the newspapers in the sample was 5,850. Mean population of the organizations served by the papers was 11,160. Almost 83 per cent of the papers were weeklies, with a mean number of pages of just under 11. Nearly 42 per cent of the papers were 8 or 12 pages, not including advertising.

Editors of the newspapers were, in most cases, enlisted men in their first or second hitches. Almost all of them

had received basic military journalist training at the Defense Information School (DINFOS), Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. This multi-service school provides training in such basic journalistic techniques as writing, editing and photography. A few editors had attended the Newspaper Editors Course at DINFOS for more advanced training, specifically in how to produce a communicative newspaper. Most editors were sergeants (44 per cent), staff sergeants (16.5 per cent) or airmen first class (14 per cent). Less than 19 per cent of the editors were civilians; most of those were at bases with a relatively large civilian population. Of the civilian editors, nearly 65 per cent were GS-9s (roughly equivalent to a lieutenant in military rank). The mean time in service for all editors was almost eight years, but close to 62 per cent had less than five years in the service. Just over 22 per cent of editors had college degrees, and 71 per cent had some college. Almost 47 per cent of editors with college experience majored in journalism or communications. More than half the editors were working on their first Air Force newspaper, and almost three-fourths had worked for one or fewer others. Their mean communications experience was almost six years altogether, about four years of that in the military. Most editors, however, had less than four years media experience, and less than three years of that in the military. Over half the editors were supervised by the non-commissioned-officer-in-charge of the

information office, and another third worked directly for the information officer.

Most of the information officers in the sample held the rank of captain (49.5 per cent) or major (25 per cent). Their mean time in the service was almost 13 years. Almost 70 per cent of them had done post-graduate college work and over 53 per cent had masters' degrees. Almost 46 per cent had majored in journalism or communications. The average information officer had worked with two other Air Force newspapers besides the present one, but almost one-third had worked with none. The mean communications media experience for information officers was just over 8 years, about 7 years of that in the military. More than three-fourths of the information officers worked directly for the commander, about one in ten for the vice commander or chief of staff.

A large majority of the commanders sampled held the rank of colonel (89 per cent), with a mean of almost 25 years in the service. The commanders had a mean education level of one year of post-graduate study and more than 60 per cent had a master's degree or higher. The average commander had worked with 1.5 newspapers other than the present one, and half of them had worked with one or fewer. Only two commanders indicated they had communications media experience.

Construction of Survey Instrument

Once the hypotheses had been developed and the sample drawn, the next step was to apply the aforementioned to construction

of the survey instrument. It was decided that a mail questionnaire was the only practical way to obtain the data. Due to the nature of the sample (military men) and the presence of support from the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Information (SAF/OI) response rate was anticipated to be high. This proved to be the case, with a total response rate of 69 per cent.

In an effort to minimize ambiguity and provide the best possible determination of attitude, Likert scales were chosen for the bulk of the questionnaire. Their use allowed for a wide range of readily-scorable opinions with a minimum danger of misunderstanding. A ladder-type ranking item was included with the Likert items as a determinant of relative importance of obstacles to production of the newspaper, as seen by the different respondents. Demographic questions were placed last on the questionnaire.

Sixteen Likert items were constructed to be used by all three respondents (commander, information officer, editor). An additional six items were constructed which were unique to each of the three respondents: these were designed to gauge reactions of the specific respondents from the viewpoint of their own positions in the gatekeeper hierarchy. There was some duplication of items between the information officer and editor.

Each of the Likert items was scaled from "Agree Strongly" to "Disagree Strongly", or from "Always" to "Never."

Scoring was from a high of 5 to a low of 1, and answers were scored according to the characteristic they were designed to judge. The items were thought to fall roughly into seven areas which are discussed more fully in Chapter III.

Pretest, Validity, Reliability

A pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with the Public Affairs staff (equivalent to an Air Force base information staff) at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Fla. A Navy base was used because of the similarity in functions and techniques, and to avoid "contaminating" survey data by pretesting with some member of the population sample. Results of the pretest indicated that very little modification of the questionnaire was needed other than minor changes in wording. The Likert items, as believed, were found to be clear and unambiguous, and according to the public affairs officer, "should provide a clear picture of the gatekeeping relationship."

After the pretest had been completed, the questionnaire was sent to the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. There it was processed through channels and subsequently approved by officials well-versed in survey techniques at the Air Force Military Personnel Center at Randolph AFB, Texas. This is standard procedure for any survey to be conducted among Air Force military and civilian personnel.

The opinions of the public affairs officer at Jacksonville NAS, survey officials at AFMPC and the Resources branch of SAF/OI were judged to be good indicators of the content validity of the questionnaire. Examination of the questionnaire would lead an objective observer to believe that the questionnaire had some construct validity as well. Reliability and internal validity were gauged from the "loading" of questionnaire items--to be discussed in Chapter III.

Analysis of the Sample

Of the 147 active duty units originally surveyed, 104 responded. Eight of those responses indicated the unit had been deactivated or did not publish a paper. Assuming an equal proportion of non-respondents are in a similar situation, a total of 11 addresses were invalid, leaving the total number of valid addresses at 136. The number of responses received in which at least two of the questionnaires were answered was 69 per cent of the total valid addresses. Just over 46 per cent of the valid addresses returned all three questionnaires.

Table 2-1 provides a breakdown of responding locations by major command. A χ^2 test of the observed versus expected frequency of major command units produced a value of 1.793 with 12 degrees of freedom. $P > .00$, indicating the sample used in this study is probably a good representation of the population.

Table 1

Responding Units by Major Command

<u>Major Command</u>	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Adjusted Frequency (Per cent)</u>	<u>Expected Frequency (Per cent)</u>
SAC	20	21.2	20.9
MAC	10	10.9	9.7
ATC	13	14.1	11.9
PACAF	3	3.3	3.7
USAFE	12	13.0	14.9
ADC	4	4.3	5.9
TAC	12	13.0	13.4
AFSC	5	5.4	5.2
AFLC	6	6.5	5.2
AFCS, AAC, HQCOM	4	4.4	4.4
USAFSS	4	4.3	4.5
Total	94	100.0	99.7

 $\chi^2 = 1.793$ with 12 d. F.

 $P > .99$

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Item Loading

One of the first tasks performed with the data was a check to be sure questionnaire items were providing the information for which they were designed. Pearson Product Moment correlations were used to examine each item's relationship with other items thought to be related to it--a test for the "loading" of each item. Pearson correlations are normally considered a good test of relationships between interval level variables, but they also are useful with ordinal variables such as these. For these Likert items, a correlation of .3000 or better was considered to indicate a moderately strong association.

The questionnaire items were thought to fall into seven categories: evaluation of self as gatekeeper by the respondent; evaluation of the commander, information officer and editor as gatekeepers; evaluation of the newspaper; controversy's place in the paper; and the newspaper's coverage of controversy. Table 2 shows the predicted clustering of the variables, the numbers as shown in Appendix A.

Table 2
Predicted Item Loading

<u>Self</u>	<u>Cmdr.</u>	<u>IO</u>	<u>Editor</u>	<u>Evaluation of paper</u>	<u>Controversy</u>	
					<u>place</u>	<u>coverage</u>
003	026	020	008	002	005	004
006	027	030*	009	007	010	021
032*			029*	022-024		025
033*			031*	028*		
034#			038#			
035#						
036#						
037#						
039#						
041-045@						

* - Commander - unique items

- Information officer - unique items

@ - Editor - unique items

Examination of the Pearson correlations revealed that the items loaded pretty much as predicted, indicating the questionnaire had adequate reliability and internal validity. There were some modifications: item 006 failed to correlate well with other variables (only two or three correlations reach .3000) and was discarded; items 029 and 031 turned out to be better self evaluators for the commander than evaluators by the commander of the editor; only item 034 of the information officer self-evaluators was retained--the others showed weak correlations (well under .3000); item 41 proved to be a weak editor self-evaluator, but was retained for other analysis; item 028 was discarded as an evaluator of the newspaper by the commander because responses were uniformly high in value; item 038 was discarded as an evaluator of the editor by the information officer and item 030 was

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					<u>place</u>	<u>coverage</u>
003	026	020	008	002	005	004
006	027	030*	009	007	010	021
032*			029*	022-024		025
033*			031*	028*		
034#			038#			
035#						
036#						
037#						
039#						
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any cell of a cross-table is three. χ^2 was used here as a measure of statistical significance when one of the two matched variables was nominal.

2) Probability - was provided when appropriate in the format $p < n$ or $p > n$, where n was the probability of the event(s) occurring by chance. If any events in this study were called "significant", it indicated $p < .05$.

3) Kendall's τ - statistic provided with cross-tables which provides a measure of association from -1 to +1. Kendall's τB was used for tables with an equal number of rows and columns, τC for tables with unequal numbers of rows and columns. Kendall's τ was cited simply as " τ ". When Kendall's τ was used, the p provided with that statistic was used, rather than that obtained using the χ^2 value.

4) Γ - used as a measure of association to accompany the χ^2 . Γ does not consider ties as valid information and is almost always close to τ in absolute value.

Evaluation of Responses

Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using frequencies, crosstabulations and Pearson Product Moment correlations. Respondent groups were analyzed separately, followed by areas of common agreement.

Commanders

Commanders were in general agreement about the nature and quality of their newspapers. Almost all of them thought

the news in their papers was always or often good news, that the reporting was always or often accurate, and that good news was well-covered. A large majority of commanders agreed that readers of their newspapers were getting information they needed (95 per cent), and that the news coverage was comprehensive and factual (92 per cent), and that significant events were always or often covered (87 per cent). A smaller majority (71 per cent) believed controversy was thoroughly covered in their papers.

Two-thirds of the commanders disagreed they made final content decisions for each issue of the paper. Over 61 per cent agreed the editor should make those content decisions under most conditions, but a sizable minority (35.5 per cent) disagreed.

✓ About 70 per cent of commanders agreed they shared responsibility for the newspaper with the information officer, made suggestions to the editor often or always, and seldom or never scrutinized the copy for each issue of the paper. Almost 59 per cent felt their opinions prevailed often or always in disagreements over stories.

The Pearson correlation (.6598) indicated that the more often commanders scrutinized the copy for each issue of the paper (item 032) the more likely they were to agree they made the final content decisions for each issue (item 003) ($p < .001$). A crossbreak for these variables disclosed that the commanders who read the copy for each issue were few

Table 4
Crosstable - Item 003 By Item 032
STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

10/19/76

***** PERSONALLY MAKES FINAL DECISION ***** READ COPY FOR EA ISSUE *****
VAR003 ***** CROSSTABULATION BY VAR032 *****

		VAR032					ROW TOTAL	
		COUNT	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIME	ALWAYS		
		ROW PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1		
		TOT PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1		
VAR003								
1.	DISAGREE STRONGLY	11	6	1	0	0	18	
		51.1	33.3	5.6	0.0	0.0	29.5	
		55.0	26.1	11.1	0.0	0.0		
2.	DISAGREE SOMEWHAT	18	11	2	0	1	22	
		36.4	50.0	9.1	0.0	4.5	36.1	
		40.0	47.8	22.2	0.0	20.0		
3.	NOT SURE	13	1	3	1	0	1	
		13.1	18.0	3.3	0.0	1.6	1.6	
		0	0	1	0	0		
4.	AGREE SOMEWHAT	0	6	5	3	0	14	
		0.0	42.9	35.7	21.4	0.0	23.0	
		0.0	26.1	55.6	75.0	0.0		
5.	AGREE STRONGLY	1	0	0	1	4	6	
		16.7	0.0	0.0	16.7	66.7	9.8	
		5.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	80.0		
COLUMNS TOTAL		20	23	9	4	5	61	
		32.8	37.7	14.8	6.6	8.2	100.0	

CHI SQUARE = 61.51782 WITH 16 DEGREES OF FREEDOM SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
KENDALL'S TAU B = 0.55851 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
KENDALL'S TAU C = 0.50188 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
GAMMA = 0.72314

NUMBER OF MISSING OBSERVATIONS = 221

(Table 4). But a commander's proclivity for reading copy appeared to be a good indicator of the extent to which he personally made the final choice of newspaper content. More than twice as many commanders personally made the final content decisions as read the copy frequently. Perhaps some made their decisions based upon limited familiarity with the material--possibly a recommendation from the information officer served in place of first-hand knowledge. While the relationship here was significant ($\tau = .55851$, $p < .001$), it appeared the trend was produced by a relatively small number of commanders.

This relationship was particularly significant in routine content matters, as can be seen by crosstabulating item 032 with item 026. Here it was found that the more often the commander read the copy for each issue the more likely he was to make decisions on routine content ($\tau = .6246$, $p < .001$). But a commander who made content decisions in a crisis (item 027) may not routinely have read the copy ($\tau = .2618$, $p < .040$). Thus, for commanders, both items 003 and 026 stood for the same things, probably the commander's penchant for making everyday newspaper content decisions. There were few, though, who did so involve themselves.

Examining the commander's copy reading habits still further revealed, not surprisingly, that they influenced his willingness to allow the editor to make content decisions. Or perhaps the commander who read the copy often did so because he felt he could not trust the editor to perform

that task. The Pearson correlation for item 032 with item 008 produced a significant ($p < .001$) negative ($r = -.4164$) relationship. Not only was the more frequent reader of copy more likely to allow his editor less freedom, he also made suggestions to the editor more frequently (item 031) ($r = .3098$, $p < .015$). The relationships between each of the latter two variables and item 032 were close enough in strength to allow speculation that what the commander considered suggestions, the editor considered something akin to an order. Perhaps the use of "suggestions" was one way in which the commander exerted control over the editor.

Information Officers

Information officers agreed with commanders that readers of their paper were getting information they needed (96 per cent), that the news in their papers was often or always good news (90 per cent), that reporting is always or often accurate (95 per cent) and that good news is well-covered (96 per cent). A far smaller percentage of information officers than commanders (76 per cent) agreed that news coverage was comprehensive and factual, but exactly the same percentage (87 per cent) as the commanders felt significant events were covered always or often.

While a larger percentage of information officers than commanders felt the editor should make most content decisions (72 per cent), a larger proportion also felt they personally made final content decisions (69 per cent). Almost 65 per

cent of information officers said they supported the editor's judgment often or always in discussions with the commander, and another 30% said they sometimes did.

Nearly 69 per cent of the information officers said they read the copy for the newspaper always or often. None said they never read it, and about 31% said they seldom read it. Apparently, information officers read copy less often than their commanders thought they did--more than 89 per cent of commanders indicated the information officer read copy always or often--and more often than their editors thought they were--about 54 per cent of editors said the information officer read the copy always or often; almost one in ten said he never read it. A majority of information officers (61 per cent) reported their decisions were seldom or never overridden by the commander.

More than half the information officers (52 per cent) disagreed that their opinions prevailed in disagreements with their commanders over newspaper content. That variable (036) correlated significantly with 039, the frequency with which the boss overrode his decisions ($\tau = .2224$, $p < .04$). The correlation indicated that if the commander trusted the information officer to make decisions, he probably respected those decisions. Kendall's τ for a crossbreak of the two variables provided a weaker measure of association (.21688) but greater significance ($p < .01$). The crossbreak itself (Table 5) showed a definite clustering in the middle. Almost

Table 5
Crosstable - Item 036 By Item 039
STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

10/19/76

***** C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N O = * * * * * D E C I S I O N O V E R R I D D E N B Y C O * * * * *
VAR036 OPINION PREVAILS IN DISAGREEMENT--IO * * * * * BY VAR039 * * * * *

COUNT		VAR039					ROW TOTAL
ROW PCT	COL PCT	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIME	SELDOM	NEVER	
TOT PCT	TOT PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1	5.1	
1. DISAGREE STRONGLY	15.8	3	2	8	6	0	19
	42.9	1	10.5	42.1	31.6	0.0	21.6
	3.4	1	50.0	34.8	12.2	0.0	
	1	1	2.3	9.1	6.8	0.0	
2. DISAGREE SOMEWHAT	3.7	1	2	5	17	2	27
	14.3	1	7.4	18.5	63.0	7.4	30.7
	1.1	1	50.0	21.7	34.7	40.0	
	1	1	2.3	5.7	19.3	2.3	
3. NOT SURE	5.3	1	0	6	10	2	19
	14.3	1	0.0	31.6	52.6	10.5	21.6
	1.1	1	0.0	26.1	20.4	40.0	
	1	1	0.0	6.8	11.4	2.3	
4. AGREE SOMEWHAT	9.1	1	0	4	15	1	22
	28.6	1	0.0	18.2	68.2	4.5	25.0
	2.3	1	0.0	17.4	30.6	20.0	
	1	1	0.0	4.5	17.0	1.1	
5. AGREE STRONGLY	0.0	1	0	0	1	0	1
	0.0	1	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	1.1
	0.0	1	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	
	0.0	1	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	
COLUMN TOTAL	7	4	23	49	55.7	5	88
	8.0	4.5	26.1	55.7		5.7	100.0

CHI SQUARE = 15.07518 WITH 16 DEGREES OF FREEDOM SIGNIFICANCE = 0.5191
KENDALL'S TAU B = 0.21688 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0092
KENDALL'S TAU B CANNOT BE COMPUTED
KENDALL'S TAU C = 0.18337 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0092
GAMMA = 0.31451

NUMBER OF MISSING OBSERVATIONS = 194

56 per cent of the information officers said their decisions seldom were overridden by the commander. Of those, the great majority (86 per cent) ranged between "Agree Somewhat" and "Disagree Somewhat" that their opinions prevailed in disagreements with the commander. Only about 35 per cent of the information officers fell along the diagonal. Most information officers, apparently, felt commanders allowed their decisions to stand, but were not overly receptive to their ideas.

The data for information officers exhibited a clustering of significant correlations between item 025, coverage of bad news and several of the information officer-unique questionnaire items (036, 037, 039). Information officers, it seemed, felt their papers covered bad news most thoroughly when their decisions were not overridden, when their opinions prevailed in disagreements with the boss, and when disagreements over content didn't make their jobs more difficult. This indicated, perhaps, that the information officer felt when he got his way, bad news got covered and to the extent others prevailed, its coverage was weakened.

When it came to decision-making, it appeared, the information officer did not always practice what he believed. The correlation between the information officer's opinion of whether the editor should be allowed to make most content decisions (008) and the frequency with which he supported his judgment in disagreements with the commander (038), was

weak (.1787) and not significant ($p = .09$). A crossbreak gave further insight into this relationship. Almost half the information officers agreed the editor should make most decisions, while always or often supporting his judgment--though less than 8 per cent always supported him. A sizable number of information officers disagreed that the editor should make most content decisions but still supported his judgment (23 per cent).

Editors

Editors' responses resembled commanders' and information officers' in several areas. They overwhelmingly agreed that their readers were getting information they needed (97 per cent), that news coverage was comprehensive and factual (80 per cent), that news in their papers was always or often good (94 per cent), that reporting was often or always accurate (97 per cent), and that significant events and good news were covered often or always (96 percent and 98 per cent respectively).

Most editors felt they made final content decisions on each issue of the paper (57.5 per cent), but a healthy minority (41.5 per cent) disagreed. Thus, where most commanders disagreed and most information officers agreed, editors appeared ambivalent. Half the editors felt their decisions were seldom or never overridden by the information officer, while another 39 per cent said they sometimes were

overridden. A greater percentage of editors (67 per cent) felt their decisions were overruled by the commander. It is doubtful that most such decisions made it as far as the commander. Most were probably overridden by the information officer in the name of the commander--"I don't think the old man will buy this." The net effect is to place the onus for overriding the decision on the commander, while allowing the editor and information officer to continue to work together amicably.

Item 040 was designed to gauge the editor's latitude in making content decisions. It seemed to perform that purpose reasonably well, correlating significantly ($p. < .01$) with items regarding the commander's decision-making under routine and crisis situations (item 026, $-.3105$; item 027, $-.2670$). The implication was that editors who had quite a bit of latitude in content decisions saw their commanders making such decisions less often.

An editor's latitude in content decisions appeared to be related to another variable--his belief that the editor should make most of the content decisions (item 008). The correlation here ($.3769$, $p. < .001$) leads to the conclusion that editors who felt the editor should make most of the content decisions were probably the editors who felt they made most of the content decisions. Editors who had greater autonomy, in other words, also felt they should be allowed to use that autonomy to make content decisions. The obverse,

of course, is that editors who reported they had less autonomy felt they should not have too much responsibility. Perhaps cognitive dissonance played a part here.

Conflicts over content seemingly had an effect on the editor's outlook on his product. The correlation was significant (.4029, p .001). It appeared that editors for whom conflicts over content had little effect on their ability to do their jobs also saw news in their papers as being more comprehensive and factual. Editors who had fewer conflicts may have had more freedom to perform their jobs as they wished to. The newspaper being "their baby," then, they would be expected to have a higher opinion of the quality of the product. A crossbreak of these two variables indicated this more strongly (τ = .30519, p < .001). More than 55% of the editors agreed that coverage was good, but disagreed that conflicts made their jobs difficult. At the other end, less than 10 per cent felt coverage was weak and that they had problems with conflicts. Perhaps this group was composed of "rebels"--those editors who pushed for stories which violated local command policy and, as a consequence, drew a lot of "flack." The larger group perhaps was composed of editors who agreed with or declined to violate local policy and thus placed comprehensive and factual coverage within that policy context.

Information officers and editors

A majority of both information officers and editors

agreed that they had quite a bit of latitude in deciding what goes into the paper, 99 per cent of the information officers and 87 per cent of the editors concurring, and disagreed that their opinions prevailed in disagreements with their bosses (52 per cent of information officers and 64.5 per cent of editors). A majority of both groups disagreed that conflicts over newspaper content made their jobs more difficult (76 per cent of information officers and 62 per cent of editors).

Though not all correlations were significant, there was a definite tendency for information officers and editors to view the newspapers' coverage as comprehensive and factual and to agree that readers were getting information they needed as a function of whether their own decisions or opinions were reflected in the paper's content. Both groups rated their papers higher when they had more autonomy and when their own opinions were salient. It appeared they also saw coverage of controversy as an important factor in getting out information readers needed and in providing comprehensive and factual coverage. A similar tendency was evidenced by commanders, but correlations were much weaker and less significant.

All respondents

As had previously been observed, all three respondent groups agreed in a number of areas--both the quantity and

quality of the coverage of good news, accuracy in reporting, and coverage of significant events. All three generally agreed as well on the extent to which the commander makes content decisions under routine and crisis conditions (Table 6). Of commanders, 77 per cent felt they made routine decisions seldom or never. On the other hand, 66 per cent felt they often or always made crisis content decisions. For information officers, 89 per cent said the commander seldom or never made routine content decisions and 61 per cent reported he often or always made crisis content decisions. Editors generally followed the same line: 83 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively, voting the same way.

Definite disagreement among the groups, however, was found in the area of controversy. About 71 per cent of commanders agreed that controversy was thoroughly covered in their papers, while 26 per cent disagreed. Information officers matched the commanders closely, 72 per cent agreeing and 25 per cent disagreeing the controversy was thoroughly covered. Editors were a different story: 72 per cent of them disagreed that controversy was thoroughly covered, and only 20 per cent agreed.

There was also difference among the three groups in their opinions on whether their papers covered bad news well. Table 7 illustrates this point. Analysis of the table showed a strong tendency for perceived thoroughness of coverage of bad news to vary by rank ($r = .52505$, $p < .001$). Of commanders, 42 per cent said bad news was always or often

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Table 6
Crosstable - Item 027 By Item 026
STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

VAR027 CO MAKES FINAL CRISIS DECISIONS C R D S S T A B U L A T I O N O F CO MAKES FINAL ROUTINE DEC

		VAR026								
		COUNT	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIME	OFTEN	ALWAYS	ROW		
		ROW PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1	5.1	TOTAL		
		COL PCT								
		TOT PCT								
VAR027	NEVER	1.	6	1	0	0	0	7		
			85.7	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9		
			5.4	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0			
			2.5	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0			
			19	14	1	0	0	34		
VAR027	SELDOM	2.	55.9	41.2	2.9	0.0	0.0	13.9		
			17.1	15.1	4.3	0.0	0.0			
			7.8	5.7	0.4	0.0	0.0			
			30	20	2	1	0	53		
			56.6	37.7	3.8	1.9	0.0	21.7		
VAR027	SOMETIMES	3.	27.0	21.5	8.7	11.1	0.0			
			12.3	8.2	0.8	0.4	0.0			
			24	23	2	1	0	50		
			48.0	46.0	4.0	2.0	0.0	20.5		
			21.6	24.7	8.7	11.1	0.0			
VAR027	OFTEN	4.	9.8	9.4	0.8	0.4	0.0			
			32	35	18	7	3	100		
			32.0	35.0	18.0	7.0	3.0	41.0		
			28.8	37.6	78.3	77.8	100.0			
			13.1	14.3	7.4	2.9	3.3			
VAR027	ALWAYS	5.	111	93	23	9	8	244		
			45.5	38.1	9.4	3.7	3.3	100.0		
			111	93	23	9	8			
		COLUMN TOTAL	111	93	23	9	8	244		
			45.5	38.1	9.4	3.7	3.3	100.0		

CHI SQUARE = 41.19574 WITH 16 DEGREES OF FREEDOM SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0005
KENDALL'S TAU B = 0.28319 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
KENDALL'S TAU C = 0.24006 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
GAMMA = 0.42232

NUMBER OF MISSING OBSERVATIONS = 38

Table 7
Crosstable - Item 025 By Item 001
STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

10/19/76

VAR025 CROSSLIST ABULAT I ON BY VAR001 OF RESPONDENT CATEGORY

	COUNT	VAR001	ICOMMANDE	IO	EDITOR	ROW TOTAL
VAR025	ROW PCT	COL PCT	TOT PCT			
NEVER	1.	0	0.0	1.1	2.1	17
		0.0	0.0	1.1	16	6.9
		0.0	0.0	1.1	94.1	
		0.0	0.0	1.1	17.2	
		0.0	0.0	1.1	6.5	
SELDOM	2.	7	9.6	32	34	73
		11.3	43.8	34.8	46.6	29.6
		2.8	13.0	13.8	36.6	
SOMETIMES	3.	29	35	35	35	99
		29.3	35.4	35.4	35.4	40.1
		46.8	38.0	37.6	37.6	
		11.7	14.2	14.2	14.2	
OFTEN	4.	21	22	22	8	51
		41.2	43.1	43.1	15.7	20.6
		33.9	23.9	23.9	8.6	
		8.5	8.9	8.9	3.2	
ALWAYS	5.	5	2	2	0	7
		71.4	28.6	28.6	0.0	2.9
		8.1	2.2	2.2	0.0	
		2.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	
COLUMN TOTAL		62	92	92	93	247
		25.1	37.2	37.2	37.7	100.0

SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000

CHI SQUARE = 54.49562 WITH 8 DEGREES OF FREEDOM
KENDALL'S TAU B = -0.36435 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
KENDALL'S TAU C = -0.37150 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
GAMMA = -0.52505

NUMBER OF MISSING OBSERVATIONS = 35

covered, 11 per cent said seldom, 0 per cent said never. About 26 per cent of information officers said bad news was always or often covered, 35 per cent seldom, 1 per cent never. Of editors, 0 per cent said bad news was always covered, 16 per cent said it often was, 37 per cent seldom, 17 per cent never.

Hypothesis 5 stated: "Air Force editors feel that Air Force commanders, like small town civilian publishers, prefer that controversy be avoided and bad news played down in their local publication." In light of the evidence presented above, hypothesis 5 was supported.

As might be expected, an apparently strong relationship existed for all three respondent groups between controversy and bad news. Crosstabulating coverage of bad news with coverage of controversy in Table 8 produced a high positive relationship. r is .56068 ($p < .001$). This seemingly indicated that respondents definitely equated controversy with bad news, but were split on the issue of how their papers covered them. Of all respondents, more than 32 per cent disagreed that controversy was thoroughly covered and said bad news was seldom or never covered. Another 20 per cent agreed controversy was thoroughly covered and felt bad news was covered always or often. Frequencies for bad news coverage revealed that five of the seven who indicated it was always covered were commanders.

All respondents were asked to rank nine obstacles to

Table 8
 Crosstable - Item 025 By Item 004
 STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
 FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

10/19/76

 VAR025 COVERAGE OF BAD NEWS

 C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N O F

 VAR004 CONTROVERSY COVERED

VAR004									
COUNT	DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NOT SURE	AGREE	SO	AGREE	ST	ROW	
ROW PCT	STRONG	SOMEWHAT		MEHAT	RONGLY			TOTAL	
COL PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1	5.1				
TOT PCT	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1	5.1				
1.	14	2	1	0	0	17			
	82.4	11.8	5.9	0.0	0.0	6.9			
	25.5	2.6	5.3	0.0	0.0				
	5.7	0.8	0.4	0.0	0.0				
2.	23	41	5	1	3	73			
	31.5	56.2	6.8	1.4	4.1	29.6			
	41.8	52.6	26.3	1.6	9.4				
	9.3	16.6	2.0	0.4	1.2				
3.	17	31	10	33	8	99			
	17.2	31.3	10.1	33.3	8.1	40.1			
	30.9	39.7	52.6	52.4	25.0				
	6.9	12.6	4.0	13.4	3.2				
4.	1	4	3	26	17	51			
	2.0	7.8	5.9	51.0	33.3	20.6			
	1.8	5.1	15.8	41.3	53.1				
	0.4	1.6	1.2	10.5	6.9				
5.	0	0	0	3	4	7			
	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.9	57.1	2.8			
	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	12.5				
	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.6				
COLUMN	55	78	19	63	32	247			
TOTAL	22.3	31.6	7.7	25.5	13.0	100.0			

CHI SQUARE = 144.07191 WITH 16 DEGREES OF FREEDOM SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0
 KENDALL'S TAU B = 0.56068 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0
 KENDALL'S TAU C = 0.51357 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0
 GAMMA = 0.72777

NUMBER OF MISSING OBSERVATIONS = 35

newspaper production by placing them in a ladder alongside the list of obstacles. This is the single item with which respondents seemed to have the greatest difficulty. Several respondents indicated they did not understand the question, several others said there were no obstacles. The number of such responses was too small to allow a test of significance, but the large majority of such replies came from commanders. Table 9 gives a breakdown of the obstacles by respondent. Percentages indicated the frequency with which a given item appears in the top two rungs of the ladder.

It is interesting to note that those items which involved one of the respondents was invariably rated lower by that respondent group than by the other two groups, and the single item which involved all three groups was rated low by all three.

The χ^2 value for the table (43.27465 with 16 d.f.) was significant ($p < .001$), indicating that differences of opinion did exist among respondent groups. Editors exhibited greater total variance from mean rankings than did either commanders or information officers, who were very close together.

As table 10 shows, if respondents were divided on the coverage of controversy and bad news, they were generally agreed on the coverage of good news. Fully 91 per cent of those who responded to item 021 felt that news in their papers was always or often good news. Almost 39 per cent of

those also felt bad news was seldom or never covered. Less than 21 per cent of the former group felt bad news was always or often covered--45 per cent of those were commanders. More than one-third of the respondents said their papers' news was often good, and bad news was sometimes covered.

The strongest of all the correlations between newspaper evaluator items was between "coverage is comprehensive and factual (item 007)" and "readers are getting information they need (item 002)." The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was .4331, ($p < .001$). Most respondents, then, seemed to feel comprehensive and factual coverage was necessary to provide readers with information they needed. But what did they feel was needed for comprehensive and factual coverage?

One likely component was bad news, with a correlation of .2672 for all respondents ($p < .001$). But distinct differences appeared when the correlations were analyzed by respondent group (see table 7). The correlation between comprehensive and factual coverage and bad news coverage was significant for both commanders (.3185, $p < .015$) and information officers (.3225, $p < .002$), but weak and insignificant for editors (.1639, $p < .12$). Because a lower percentage of information officers than either of the other two respondent groups (76 per cent, versus 92 per cent for commanders and 80 per cent for editors) said coverage was comprehensive and factual, the correlation for that group

remained high, as it was for commanders--many of whom were favorable on both items. But editors said bad news was poorly covered, while maintaining that coverage was comprehensive and factual. A number of reasons could be postulated for this paradox, but the most likely is that editors have defined comprehensive and factual coverage within the context of local policy. Coverage, then, became as comprehensive and factual as the policies would allow. Most editors apparently felt they were not allowed to cover bad news thoroughly, so that aspect was not considered a component of good news coverage.

Creating and Ranking Gatekeeper Indices

One of the key elements of this study, and one which sets it apart from similar studies, was the concept of the primary gatekeeper. Selecting primary gatekeepers required two major procedures: 1) scoring commanders, information officers and editors as gatekeepers, and then 2) ranking those scores to determine the primary gatekeeper.

An index was created for each gatekeeper group--labeled either COINDEX, IOINDEX or EDINDEX. Each index represented the mean of four separate questionnaire items chosen for their strength of correlation with each other. A base item was selected for each index--an all-respondent item which added a dimension of depth to the index because it provided input from all respondents simultaneously.

For the commanders, the central item was 026:

"The commander makes the final decision on what 'routine' stories will be printed in the paper."

For the information officers it was item 020:

"The information officer reads all or most of the copy for the paper."

And for the editor, it was item 008:

"I think that, except on rare occasions, the internal newspaper editor should make the decisions on what is printed in each issue of the paper."

These items were chosen because they correlated significantly with items of similar loading, and negatively with each other and items of dissimilar loading. Three other items were selected for each index, representing the group opinions of each of the other gatekeeper groups and the gatekeeper's own group. Again, those items were chosen which correlated most highly with the central item, rather than simply using respondent-unique items. When all-respondent variables were used, the computer was instructed to take scores only from the appropriate gatekeeper group.

For the commander, the other three items were 032, 045 and 027:

"I scrutinize the copy to go into each issue of the paper before it is printed." (Self evaluator)

"My decision to run or not to run a story is overridden by the commander." (Editor evaluator of commander)

"The commander makes the final decision on what 'crisis' stories will be printed (aircraft accident, crime, etc.)." (Information officer evaluator of commander)

For the information officer, the other items were 003, 044 and 027 (027 had significant negative correlation with

information officer-loaded items and was recoded for use in the IOINDEX):

"I make the final decisions on what goes into each issue of the paper." (Self evaluator)

"My decision to run or not to run a story is overridden by the information officer." (Editor evaluator of information officer)

"The commander makes the final decision on what 'crisis' stories will be printed (aircraft accident, crime, etc.)." (Commander evaluator of information officer)

The three editor items were 040, 009 and 031:

"I have quite a bit of latitude in deciding what goes into each issue of the newspaper." (Self evaluator)

"In my opinion, the editor's job involves a great deal of responsibility." (Information officer evaluator of editor)

"I make suggestions to the editor of our internal newspaper on news and feature story ideas." (Commander evaluator of editor)

The indices were then computed, using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) technique which can be found in Appendix B.

Once the gatekeeper indices had been created, they were then ranked by the computer using the second procedure in Appendix B, providing a Primary Gatekeeper Index--labeled PGIC, PGII and PGIE. A ranking was assigned to each PGI of 1 to 3. Frequencies were run on the PGIs with results as reported in table 11. The value of χ^2 for the table was 584.27 with four degrees of freedom ($p < .001$).

The table indicates a clear division of PGI rankings. Editors ranked as the primary gatekeeper almost 72 per cent

Table 11
PGI Distribution By Respondent

<u>PGI</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
PGIC	56	129	12
PGII	4	17	216
PGIE	145	47	10

of the time, and the secondary gatekeeper 23 per cent of the time. Where the editor was not the primary gatekeeper, that position was almost always occupied by the commander--28 per cent of the time. The overlapping of percentages indicated there were instances in which ties occurred. The commander was designated the secondary gatekeeper in 65 per cent of the cases. The information officer, clearly, was most often considered the tertiary gatekeeper--in over 91 per cent of the cases.

As clear as these divisions were, they were not definitive. To be of any real value, these rankings must indicate the identity of the primary, secondary and tertiary gatekeepers for each organization or base represented in the sample. A compilation of such rankings would have provided a valid insight into gatekeeper relationships.

A two-step process was used to produce these rankings for each location. The first step involved deriving for each gatekeeper position at each location a composite, or mean, index. This was constructed by taking the mean of each of the gatekeeper indices from the respondents in a given location. SPSS subprogram AGGREGATE, designed to group data

as values of a designated group variable, was used to compute indices by location.

The composite indices were punched onto cards in binary format as output from the AGGREGATE procedure. Since the other data cards were punched using the more common binary code decimal (BCD) format, the ranking of the composite indices had to be performed on a separate computer run. The resulting PGIs by location are displayed in table 12. χ^2 for the table was 389.58 with four d.f. ($p < .001$).

The χ^2 value for this table must be considered suspect, since several cells have frequencies of less than 3. Collapsing the cells was not practical, however, and probably would not affect the significance. There were nine missing values from both the PGIC and PGIE, indicating that on at least nine occasions there was a tie between the EDINDEX and COINDEX for first place. The sharp partitioning of the gatekeepers seen in the PGIs analyzed at the individual level was even more pronounced here. There seemed little doubt that the editor was, under most conditions, the primary

Table 12
PGI Distribution By Location

<u>PGI</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
PGIC	15	70	1
PGII	0	1	93
PGIE	71	15	0

gatekeeper for the internal newspaper. Hypothesis 1 stated:

"The Air Force editor is not, in most cases, the primary gatekeeper."

The preponderance of evidence indicates that, on the contrary, the editor was in most cases the primary gatekeeper. The hypothesis, therefore, was not supported.

The relationship between the gatekeeper indices and PGI was significant for both information officers and editors but not for commanders. The only strong relationship, however, was PGIE with EDINDEX ($r = .30489$, $p < .001$) (Table 13). Aside from the editors, there was a weak tendency for higher gatekeeper index scores to produce higher PGI ratings. This weakness indicated that scores probably covaried by location, a given location having all low scores or all high scores.

Several more hypotheses could be examined, using the PGI as an indicator of the primary gatekeeper. Hypothesis 2 stated:

"The editor is more likely to be the primary gatekeeper under routine conditions, but will lose much of his autonomy in a crisis."

Item 041, an editor-only item, says:

"I am allowed to decide what facts will be printed in the paper about a crisis (accident, crime, etc.) without checking with my boss."

Almost 83 per cent of the editors disagreed with this statement, less than 11 per cent agreeing. Table 14 shows only about 15 per cent of editors said the commander seldom or never made crisis decisions. Another 12 per cent said

Table 13

Crosstable - EDINDEX By PGIE

10/19/76

STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02

FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

***** C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N O F *****
 EDINDEX BY PGIE *****

EDINDEX	COUNT	PGIE	1.	2.	9.	ROW TOTAL
	ROW PCT					
	COL PCT					
	TOT PCT					
1.6 - 2.5	2.		9	33	3	45
			20.0	73.3	6.7	16.0
			4.2	73.3	12.5	
			3.2	11.7	1.1	
2.6 - 3.5	3.		126	12	18	156
			80.8	7.7	11.5	55.3
			59.2	26.7	75.0	
			44.7	4.3	6.4	
3.6 - 4.5	4.		78	0	0	78
			100.0	0.0	0.0	27.7
			36.6	0.0	0.0	
			27.7	0.0	0.0	
4.6 - 5.0	5.		0	0	3	3
			0.0	0.0	100.0	1.1
			0.0	0.0	12.5	
			0.0	0.0	1.1	
COLUMN TOTAL			213	45	24	282
			75.5	16.0	8.5	100.0

CHI SQUARE = 177.82901 WITH 6 DEGREES OF FREEDOM
 KENDALL'S TAU B = -0.41942 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
 KENDALL'S TAU C = -0.30489 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0000
 GAMMA = -0.71157
 SIGNIFICANCE = 0.0

Table 14
 Crosstable - Item 027 By Item 041
 STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES SPSSH - RELEASE 6.02
 FILE GATEKPR (CREATION DATE = 10/10/76)

10/19/76

***** C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N O F *****
 VAR027 CJ MAKES FINAL CRISIS DECISIONS BY VAR311 *****

VAR027		VAR311				AGREE SO		ROW	
						MEWHAT		TOTAL	

he made such decisions sometimes, while the remaining 73 per cent felt he did so always or often. These percentages are very close to the frequencies for all respondents, indicating, as previously stated, a great deal of agreement among all respondents that the commander makes most content decisions in a crisis. It is safe to conclude then that the editor loses his position as primary gatekeeper to the commander under other than routine conditions. The hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated:

"The extent to which the editor performs as the primary gatekeeper is a function of his rank and experience and of the importance attached to the newspaper by his commander, in terms of its value to the commander in performing his mission."

To test this hypothesis, PGIE was crosstabulated with rank, time in service, communications media experience, military communications media experience and item 028--a commander-unique item which states, "The internal newspaper is important to me in the performance of my mission." None of the crosstables were significant, and analysis revealed no discernible relationships, though there was some indication lower ranking editors were less likely to be the primary gatekeepers. The item 028 crosstable displayed a very weak tendency for PGIE rankings to be lower in units where the commander agreed strongly that the newspaper was valuable to his mission. But the lack of spread of scores on the item (all commanders agreed with the statement) and low significance

made any conclusions extremely dubious. The hypothesis was not supported.

As an additional test, PGIE was crosstabulated with base size, major command and immediate supervisor. Again, none of the tables were significant and none indicate any recognizable pattern.

Hypothesis 4 stated:

"The obstacles an editor perceives as preventing his doing his job the way he feels it should be done will vary in kind and number, depending upon whether or not he is the primary gatekeeper."

Crosstabulations of PGIE with the obstacle variables (011 - 019) produced no tables that were significant and consistently weak measures of association. No significant differences were observed between editors who were and were not the primary gatekeeper in their locations. The hypothesis was not supported.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the manner in which content decisions are made on the internal newspapers published by active duty Air Force units. A questionnaire designed to elicit responses from the three persons in each unit most likely to make such decisions--the commander, the information officer and the newspaper editor--about the nature of the decision-making process was distributed to 147 active duty units.

Central to this study was the concept of the primary gatekeeper, defined as the person designated by two of the three respondents at each location as the one who made content decisions under most conditions. A ranking of gatekeeper indices was performed and it was found that in the vast majority of locations, the newspaper editor was, under most conditions, the primary gatekeeper. In almost every case where the editor was not the primary gatekeeper, the commander occupied that position, in large part, very likely, because of decisions made in his name by the information officer.

Five hypotheses were tested in the study:

Hypothesis 1: The Air Force editor is not, in most cases the primary gatekeeper. Since the majority of editors were observed to have a PGIE of 1--indicating the primary gatekeeper--the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2: The editor is more likely to be the primary gatekeeper under routine conditions, but will lose much of his autonomy in a crisis. Since a large majority of editors disagreed that they made content decisions during a crisis and all three respondent groups agreed by a wide margin that such decisions often were made by the commander, the hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 3: The extent to which the editor performs as a primary gatekeeper is a function of his rank and experience and of the importance attached to the newspaper by his commander, in terms of its value to the commander in performing his mission. PGIE and EDINDEX were crosstabulated with rank and communications media experience of editors and with a questionnaire item seeking the commander's opinion about the newspaper's value to him. Again, none of the tables were significant and measures of association were similarly very weak. The hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 4: The obstacles an editor sees to his being able to perform his job the way he feels it should be performed will vary in kind and number depending upon whether or not he is the primary gatekeeper. Editors' responses to the questionnaire item asking for a ranking of obstacles was

crosstabulated with PGIE, the editor's ranking as a gatekeeper in his unit. None of the tables was significant and measures of association were uniformly low. The hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 5: Air Force editors believe that Air Force commanders, like small town civilian publishers, prefer that controversy be avoided and bad news played down in their local publications. A majority of editors indicated they felt bad news was covered seldom or never, and almost three out of four disagreed that controversy was thoroughly covered. In contrast, 42 per cent of commanders said bad news was covered often or always and almost three of four said controversy was thoroughly covered. The hypothesis was supported.

Findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the functioning of the editor as the primary gatekeeper depends not upon his rank or experience, his major command, the size of his base, etc., but depends heavily upon a single factor --the commander's inclination to involve himself in internal newspaper content decisions. These data indicate he does this rarely, unless something of extraordinary importance takes place. As Bagdikian said, "Decisions on major stories are usually...made by others." (1971: 89). Under normal, everyday conditions, he is apparently too busy with other matters to take time to make newspaper content decisions, so he leaves that task to his information officer. And it appears most information officers--who say they rarely read

all or most of the copy for the newspaper--are maintaining a "hands off" policy toward the newspaper, involving themselves infrequently with actual content decisions. Once he has placed a responsible person in charge of the newspaper, the information officer seems inclined to let him run it pretty much as he pleases. But the editor apparently is allowed this freedom only so long as he follows the policy rules, which in most cases seem to indicate that controversy and bad news are to be avoided--at least in the editor's opinion. To that extent, Hiatt was probably correct when he said, "...the real gatekeepers are the supervisors who made the policies" (1970: 110). The Air Force newspaper editor, then, has much in common with his civilian counterpart--the employee publication editor--and with editors of small community newspapers. The institutional setting plays an important role, it seems, in the functioning of the Air Force internal newspaper gatekeeper, just as it does in the functioning of commercial media gatekeepers.

This study leaves several questions unanswered, suitable for further research. One important one is, "How does news policy, both local and higher headquarters, affect gatekeeping decisions?" Hiatt (1970) believes non-local policy has a profound effect on gatekeeping decisions. This study concluded that the commander has a considerable amount of influence in such decisions, thus policy set by him--either overtly or covertly--would likely have a similar effect.

Another question to be answered is, "What factors determine how much actual decision making freedom is allowed the editor by the commander?" "Is it a function of the commander's managerial style, the editor's persuasiveness or skill, the support provided the editor by the information officer?"

Future research along these lines can contribute much to the relatively small store of knowledge of how gatekeeping decisions are made, not only in the Air Force but in employee publications in general and perhaps in commercial media as well.

APPENDIX A:
QUESTIONNAIRE

PAGE 2 - COMMANDER

4. Please indicate your response with an "X", just as in Question 1.

- (028) a. The internal newspaper is important to me in the performance of my mission.
- (029) b. I believe it is important for me to supervise the editor's work directly.
- (030) c. I think of the newspaper as the information officer's responsibility, not mine.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Not Sure	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly

5. Please indicate your response with an "X".

- (031) a. I make suggestions to the editor of our internal newspaper on news and feature story ideas.
- (032) b. I scrutinize the copy to go into each issue of the paper before it is printed.
- (033) c. When there is a disagreement with the information officer or newspaper editor over what stories will be printed or not printed in the paper, my opinion usually prevails.

Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

6. Please provide the following information as appropriate. To preserve anonymity please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

Rank or GS rating: (046) Age: _____ Time in service: (047) years Have you or will you reenlist? Yes (048) No N/A

Level of education: High school graduate _____ Years of college: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (049)

Degrees held: (050) Major(s): (051)

Newspaper circulation: (052) Base population: (053)

(054) Frequency of publication: Weekly _____ Biweekly _____ Monthly _____ Quarterly _____

(055) Average number of pages per issue (excluding advertising): _____

(056) Not counting the present one, how many Air Force newspapers have you worked with? _____

(057) Number of daily and weekly publications (in English) available to people at your installation: _____

(058) Number of television stations (English language) available to people at your installation: _____

(059) Number of radio stations available....: _____

Your communications media experience in years (full time): (060) How much of that in military? (061)

(062) Name of parent MAJCOM news service, if any: _____

(063) Are you located on the same base with one of your higher headquarters? Yes _____ No _____

(064) If yes, does it have an Information staff? Yes _____ No _____

(065) My immediate supervisor is the: Information officer _____ NCOIC of Information Office _____
Commander _____ Other (please specify) _____

PAGE 2 - INFORMATION OFFICER

4. Please indicate your response with an "X", just as in Question 1.

- (034) a. I have quite a bit of latitude in deciding what goes into each issue of our newspaper.
- (035) b. I am allowed to decide what facts will be printed in the paper about a "crisis" (accident, crime, etc.) without checking with my boss.
- (036) c. When there is a disagreement with my boss over what will be printed in the paper, my opinion usually prevails.
- (037) d. I think conflicts over what stories to print in the paper make it difficult for me to do my job.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Not Sure	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly

5. Please indicate your response with an "X".

- (038) a. I support the editor's judgement in conflicts with my boss or his staff over stories to be printed in the paper.
- (039) b. My decision to run or not to run a story is overridden by the Commander.

Always	Often	Some-times	Seldom	Never

6. Please provide the following information as appropriate. To preserve anonymity please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

- Rank or GS rating: (046) Age: Time in service: (047) years Have you or will you reenlist? Yes No R/A (048)
- Level of education: High school graduate Years of college: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (049)
- Degrees held: (050) Major(s): (051)
- Newspaper circulation: (052) Base population: (053)
- (054) Frequency of publication: Weekly Biweekly Monthly Quarterly
- (055) Average number of pages per issue (excluding advertising):
- (056) Not counting the present one, how many Air Force newspapers have you worked with?
- (057) Number of daily and weekly publications (in English) available to people at your installation:
- (058) Number of television stations (English language) available to people at your installation:
- (059) Number of radio stations available....:
- Your communications media experience in years (full time): (060) How much of that in military? (061)
- (062) Name of parent MAJCOM news service, if any:
- (063) Are you located on the same base with one of your higher headquarters? Yes No
- (064) If yes, does it have an Information Staff? Yes No
- (065) My immediate supervisor is the: Information officer NCOIC of Information Office
Commander Other (please specify)

PAGE 2 - EDITOR

4. Please indicate your response with an "X", just as in Question 1.

- (040) a. I have quite a bit of latitude in deciding what goes into each issue of our newspaper.
- (041) b. I am allowed to decide what facts will be printed in the paper about a crisis (accident, crime, etc.) without checking with my boss.
- (042) c. When there is a disagreement with my boss over what will be printed in the paper, my opinion usually prevails.
- (043) d. I think conflicts over which stories to print in the paper make it difficult for me to do my job.

Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Not Sure	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly

5. Please indicate your response with an "X".

- (044) a. My decision to run or not to run a story is overridden by the information officer.
- (045) b. My decision to run or not to run a story is overridden by the Commander.

Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

6. Please provide the following information as appropriate. To preserve anonymity please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

Rank or GS rating: (046) Age: _____ Time in service: (047) _____ years Have you or will you reenlist? Yes (048) _____ No _____ M/A _____

Level of education: High school graduate _____ Years of college: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (049)

Degrees held: (050) _____ Major(s): (051) _____

Newspaper circulation: (052) _____ Base population: (053) _____

(054) Frequency of publication: Weekly _____ Biweekly _____ Monthly _____ Quarterly _____

(055) Average number of pages per issue (excluding advertising): _____

(056) Not counting the present one, how many Air Force newspapers have you worked with? _____

(057) Number of daily and weekly publications (in English) available to people at your installation: _____

(058) Number of television stations (English language) available to people at your installation: _____

(059) Number of radio stations available...: _____

Your communications media experience in years (full time): (060) _____ How much of that in military? (061) _____

(062) Name of parent MAJCOM news service, if any: _____

(063) Are you located on the same base with one of your higher headquarters? Yes _____ No _____

(064) If yes, does it have an Information Staff? Yes _____ No _____

My immediate supervisor is the: Information officer _____ NCOIC of Information Office _____

(065) Commander _____ Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX B

SPSS Procedure for Constructing Gatekeeper Indices

```
IF          (VAR001 EQ 1)VAR100=VAR027
IF          (VAR001 EQ 2)VAR101=VAR003
COMPUTE     IOINDEX=9
COMPUTE     SUM=0
COMPUTE     N=0
DO REPEAT   $V1=VAR101,VAR020,VAR044,VAR100
IF          ($V1 NE 8 AND 9)SUM=SUM+$V1
IF          ($V1 NE 8 AND 9)N=N+1
END REPEAT
```

The procedure is repeated for each of the other two indices. Note \$V1 is a "stand-in" variable used in the DO REPEAT procedure.

SPSS Procedure for Ranking Gatekeeper Indices

```
COMPUTE     PGII=9
IF          (IOINDEX GT COINDEX AND EDINDEX)PGII=1
IF          (IOINDEX GT COINDEX AND IOINDEX LT EDINDEX)PGII=2
IF          (IOINDEX GT EDINDEX AND IOINDEX LT COINDEX)PGII=2
IF          (IOINDEX LT COINDEX AND EDINDEX)PGII=3
```

The procedure is repeated for each of the other indices. Ties between two PGI rankings were indicated by the computer as 9s for each of the gatekeepers involved.

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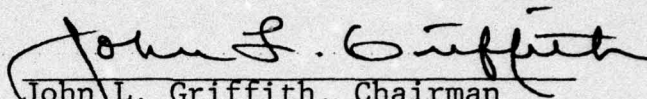
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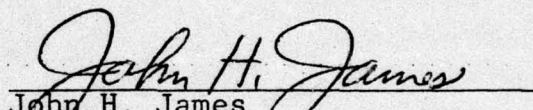
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ray Alan Crockett was born March 12, 1945 in Birdham, Sussex, Britain. He graduated from Colonial High School in Orlando, Florida in 1963 and was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Journalism in 1967 from the University of Florida. Since January, 1968, he has been on active duty with the U.S. Air Force as an information officer, with assignments to Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. He is a member of the Arnold Air Society and Kappa Tau Alpha, national journalism honorary. His master's degree was pursued under the auspices of the Air Force Institute of Technology.

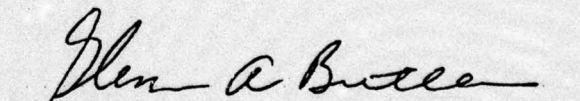
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John L. Griffith, Chairman
Professor of Journalism

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communications.

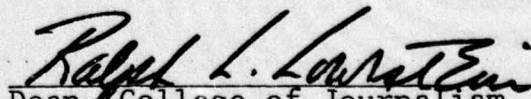

John H. James
Associate Professor of
Management

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communications.


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This thesis was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Journalism and Communications and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communications.

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